

Trauma-Informed Response to Disclosures of Sexual Misconduct

USU Employee Guide

How we respond to a disclosure of sexual misconduct is critical. Judgment and disbelief can silence an individual while a response of belief and empathy can empower them.

Recognize and correct implicit biases that may impact how you respond.



Implicit bias may sound like:
"Men can't be victims of sexual assault."
"If someone is drinking, they are partially responsible for their assault."

Validate.

"I am so sorry that this has happened, but I am so glad you came to me. I want to support you."



Interrupt and inform.

Ensure you interrupt a potential disclosure to explain your reporting obligations.

Visit equity.usu.edu for more information regarding your reporting obligations.



Listen with empathy.

It is important to set aside concerns about how you're going to respond and simply be present with the individual as they disclose to you. You can do this by actively listening.



Empower.

Remind the individual they are valued. Tell them this was not their fault and they have nothing to be ashamed of. Let them know they are in control of what they want to do next.

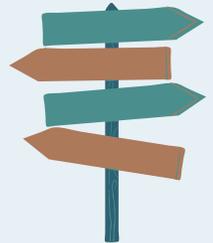


Provide resources.

Ensure their safety, by explicitly asking if they feel safe.

If they are not safe, connect them with law enforcement, a SAAVI advocate, or CAPS counselor immediately.

If they are safe, visit sexualrespect.usu.edu to talk with them about their options.



Take care of yourself.

Receiving a disclosure of sexual misconduct can leave you feeling a range of emotions.

Confidential support from SAAVI is available to you before, during, and after a disclosure.



We encourage you to keep in mind whether materials that you share in your courses or workspace may be triggering for individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct and include a content warning whenever possible.

Your Response Matters

A trauma-informed response is one of empowerment. An empowering response validates an individual's experience, provides them with resources, and places control back into their hands. A controlling, gatekeeping, or minimizing response may cause emotional harm.



DO: Empower

An empowering response indicates you are certain that the person disclosing needs/deserves resources and allows the individual to make the decision about using them.

"I am so sorry you're going through this. If you'd like, I can go to the SAAVI Office with you to talk with an advocate, but only if you're comfortable."



DON'T: Control

A controlling response indicates you are certain that the person disclosing needs/deserves resources and you will make the decisions for the individual about using them.

"You can't take a shower until evidence is collected. I am taking you to the hospital right now."



DON'T: Gatekeep

A gatekeeping response indicates you are not certain that the person disclosing needs/deserves resources. With this response, you decide whether or not to provide resources after gathering additional information.

"I'm not sure if what you experienced was bad enough to report to the Title IX Coordinator. Can you tell me how bad your mental health is right now?"



DON'T: Minimize

A minimizing response indicates you are not certain that the person disclosing needs/deserves resources and says that the individual can use resources only if they feel harmed or distressed.

"The comments you've been receiving are pretty normal in this department. But if you're feeling wronged, I guess you could talk to your supervisor."

Adapted from Holland KJ, Badera N. "Call for Help Immediately": A Discourse Analysis of Resident Assistants' Responses to Sexual Assault Disclosures. *Violence Against Women*. 2020;26(11):1383-1402. doi:10.1177/1077801219863879